

The Newton Record

SPORTS

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Late basketball legend got start in Decatur

■ LSU coaching great, former East Central star Sue Gunter dies at age 66.

By Kenneth Billings

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A legendary women's basketball coach whose career beginnings trace back to a humble start at East Central Junior College is dead after a losing a lengthy battle with the illness that ended her career.

Former Louisiana State University head women's basketball coach and ECJC alumnae Sue Gunter passed away at her Baton Rouge, La., home Aug. 4 from respiratory

See **GUNTER**, Page 11A

THE GUNTER FILE



Gunter

- Assistant Coach of 1976 Olympic Team that won a Silver Medal
- Named to coach the 1980 U.S. Olympic team but the games were boycotted by the United States
- Won Olympic Qualifying Tournament in 1980
- Converse Region IV Coach of the Year in 1983
- Basketball News National Coach of the Year in 1983
- Women's NIT Champions in 1985, SEC Tournament Champions in 1991

- Recipient of Carol Eckman Award in 1994
- SEC Coach of the Year in 1997 and 1999
- Louisiana Coach of the Year in 1983, 1997, 2002 and 2003
- Inducted into the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame in 2000
- WBCA Regional Coach of the Year in 2003
- Third winningest head coach in NCAA history with 708 career wins
- Inducted into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in 2005

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Gunter

From Page 1A

problems stemming from emphysema.

Gunter, 66, began her athletic career when she left home in Walnut Grove in Leake County to attend ECJC, where she discovered and developed a love for basketball that would carry her through a stellar coaching career and make her a pioneer for women's athletics at the college level.

Along the way she accrued a serpentine list of accolades and a win-loss record that put her among the winningest coaches in women's basketball.

It was at ECJC where Gunter first met Lucille Wood, whom she credited with launching her career. Wood was head of women's athletics at the school in 1957 when Gunter enrolled for classes.

"She always gave credit to Lucille for giving her her start," former teammate and long time friend Lois Cooper of Decatur said of Gunter. "It was Lucille who coached us and taught us about the

game and she never forgot. A few years ago Lucille and I went to Starkville to watch (LSU) play Mississippi State. When she learned we were there she came up into the stands to say hello. That's just the kind of person she was.

"She told even Lucille if her team got into trouble, in the last two minutes she was going to put her to coaching and she and I would take the floor and it would be just like old times."

After coaching Gunter, Wood encouraged her to attend Peabody College in Nashville so she could play basketball for the Nashville Business College while earning her degree.

Gunter took her mentor's advice and went on to earn All-America honors as a player. She would later be named to the most prestigious place of honor in basketball for her coaching - The Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame.

In a career spanning 40 years, Gunter notched 708 victories to make her the third-winningest women's basketball coach of all time behind Pat Summit of Tennessee and Judy Conradt of Texas.

In 22 years as head coach

at LSU, Gunter amassed a 442-221 record and led the Lady Tigers to 13 NCAA tournament berths and a Final Four appearance as well as a WNIT championship in 1985 and an SEC Tournament Championship in 1991.

Gunter's success and hard work made her a pioneer, paving the way for women's athletics to flourish in the college ranks.

"When she got started there was very little for women in the way of college athletics," Wood said. "She is truly a pioneer. She was involved in getting women's programs established and accepted. When she started, the programs just weren't there. The people in charge just didn't put any focus on it because they didn't think girls need to go through that."

"She was there helping get it established. She was out there coaching and fighting for women's sports when there were only a handful of people in the stands."

Gunter's coaching career ended abruptly in the middle of the 2003-04 season after falling ill. She was later diagnosed with emphysema and pneumonia.